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Marine Corps University
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AUTHOR:

MAJ Kenrick D Forrester

AY 12-13

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: J.W. Gordon

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 4/11/13

Oral Defense Committee Member: [Signature]

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 4/10/13

JOSEPH E. CROSS
Joseph E. Cross
11 APRIL 2013

Executive Summary

The American Way of War: Revisited and Reaffirmed

Author: Major Kenrick D Forrester, United States Army

Thesis: The U.S. Army should continue to reaffirm the American way of war by maintaining its dominance in traditional warfare in order to defeat existential threats while employing its Special Operations Forces (SOF) to shape and mitigate irregular threats within the global operational environment.

Discussion: The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the ability of insurgencies to use irregular warfare to neutralize the U.S. Army's ability to decisively end both wars. As a result of the U.S. Army's inability to win decisively, there has been a great deal of discussion within and outside of the U.S. Army on how to deal with irregular threats. There is a great deal of pressure on the U.S. Army to change its doctrine and organization to defeat irregular threats. The Army has gone as far as experimenting with regional brigades that gain limited cultural and language training and deploy in segments to conduct Foreign Internal Defense with allies and partners. Irregular warfare is not new and the U.S. Army has been facing irregular threats from its inception. However, upon deeper analysis, the U.S. Army has historically faced traditional threats, not irregular threats. The primary threat to the survival of the United States is other nation-states that maintain the capability to significantly and systemically destroy military forces, infrastructure, and other key elements of national power. Catastrophic, disruptive, and irregular threats require external actors, specifically nation-states, to be successful. The approach that will work to defeat irregular threats is the use of traditional forces to deter or defeat external actors and the use of U.S. Army Special Operations Forces to enable host nation governments to create maneuver space to defeat insurgent or transnational actors within their borders.

Conclusion: Defeating irregular threats will require traditional warfare to limit external actors from providing support to transnational organizations and insurgencies, while providing host nation and SOF forces the ability to deny these elements the maneuver space to conduct activities. The strength of the U.S. Army is the ability to combine these actions to defeat both traditional and irregular threats.

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Preface

The U.S. Army is in a state of transition after wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. After ten years of conflict, the U.S. Army will have to transition to a force prepared to defeat the next threat that will face the United States. The challenge facing the U.S. Army is applying the lessons learned from the last ten years towards the conflicts of the future. The intent of this paper is to define the threats of today and prepare for future warfare based on lessons learned throughout our history. I would like to acknowledge Dr. John W. Gordon for his guidance, wisdom and support during the development of this paper.

This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin--war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him. It is a form of warfare uniquely adapted to what has been strangely called "wars of liberation," to undermine the efforts of new and poor countries to maintain the freedom that they have finally achieved. It preys on economic unrest and ethnic conflicts. – John F. Kennedy¹

American experience with guerrilla warfare has been limited by the strength of American arms. The United States has been able to mobilize overwhelming economic and military power and bring it to bear directly on the enemy, attacking him not where he was weakest but where he was strongest, because we were stronger still. American military doctrine has reflected this experience. – Samuel P. Huntington²

The U.S. Army is currently in transition from ten years of counter-insurgency (COIN) operations in Iraq and Afghanistan while also facing significant threats and issues in the future. By far, the majority of threats the U.S. Army will face in the next ten years will be irregular in nature and will require expertise in COIN, counter-terrorism (CT), and foreign internal defense (FID)³. At present, there is significant debate and deliberation on the transformation of the U.S. Army into a force that is capable of responding to the emergence of irregular threats. Such deliberation occurs from a perceived lack of preparedness to defeat these types of threats⁴; however, this viewpoint would be misinformed and does not reflect the true capabilities of the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army should continue to reaffirm the American way of war by maintaining its dominance in traditional warfare in order to defeat existential threats while employing its

Special Operations Forces (SOF) to shape and mitigate irregular threats within the global operational environment.

The United States will be faced with adversaries that will attempt to attack its territory, citizens and interests through irregular warfare methods. Transnational organizations and adversary nation-states have viewed the U.S. Army's less than decisive results in COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as a possible weakness to be exploited in future engagements. As the largest organization within the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), and the organization primarily responsible for the land domain, the U.S. Army will be required to deter and defeat irregular warfare threats in the future. The U.S. Army will have to organize, train, maintain, equip, and deploy a force capable of defeating its enemies within a complex global environment.

The U.S. Army will have to face irregular threats in a resource constrained environment due to the decline of the U.S. economy and the refocusing of the federal budget on other national priorities. The declining defense budget will mean the U.S. Army will have to shrink its force structure and reexamine future equipment procurement based on its new levels of funding.⁵ History has demonstrated that periods after long U.S. combat engagements have resulted in an environment of austerity and reduction in Army end-strength. The U.S. Army must identify the threats it is likely to face in the future in an effective manner in order to apply the limited resources available towards those threats.⁶

This paper will first examine the four types of threats the U.S. Army faces in the future and the capabilities needed to combat these threats. The two primary threats, traditional and irregular, will be discussed in depth due to the likelihood of the U.S. Army encountering these threats. The conclusion is traditional threats, specifically nation-state versus nation-state, will happen less frequently in the future but will have a significant impact on the very existence of

the country when they happen. Irregular threats will happen more frequently in the future, but their disruptive effects on U.S. national power can be mitigated and defeated if the appropriate SOF and conventional capabilities are used.

Types of Threats

Threats the U.S. Army will face in the future will fall into four major categories; traditional, irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive.⁷ The 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) incorporated these threats into a framework that is of value to the U.S. Army while also identifying the capabilities required to defeat these threats. The QDR also asserted that the majority of the DoD capabilities were focused on the traditional threats and not toward the other threat categories, which suggested an imbalance in the capabilities needed for the other threat categories. The QDR stated that the objective of the DoD in the future is the “reorientation of military capabilities and implementing enterprise-wide reforms to ensure structures and process support” the needs of the nation.⁸

The two least likely categories of threats the U.S. Army will have to confront in the future are catastrophic and disruptive threats. Catastrophic threats are defined as “scenarios with extreme, highly damaging attacks against the United States and its allies.”⁹ Generally, the threats most often identified as catastrophic threats are weapons of mass destruction, specifically chemical, biological, and radiological threats or nuclear weapons. The likelihood of a significant attack of this type occurring within the United States is considered low, but the possibility of this type of attack against U.S. interests abroad or against U.S. allies is far more likely.

The last significant catastrophic attack against the U.S. was the attack on September 11, 2001. Al Qaeda used commercial airliners as missiles to attack New York City and Washington, DC. The attacks were significant enough to forever change the way of life for every U.S. citizen.

To defend against catastrophic attacks, the U.S. government must defend its territory, citizens and interests against these types of attacks. The U.S. government accomplishes this task by defensive and offensive activities. In terms of defending the continental United States, the U.S. Army must apply capabilities that are in support of other U.S. agencies. These agencies have greater legal authority to operate within the U.S. border.¹⁰ The U.S. Army will need to use its capability to logistically support government agencies in contaminated or austere terrain. The U.S. Army also has the capabilities to deploy large combat support hospitals, helicopter lift assets and transportation battalions to move cargo and personnel. The U.S. Army National Guard is also uniquely organized to rapidly respond to these types of threats because they reside throughout all 50 states and can be activated by the state governor during times of crisis. These capabilities are currently within the U.S. Army's ability and must be maintained.¹¹

The U.S. Army has the capability to detect, defeat and destroy elements that are attempting to conduct catastrophic attacks. The most likely organizations to attempt these types of attacks are terrorist or criminal organizations. Within the United States, the U.S. Army is severely restricted in its ability to act on these types of threats due to legal constraints. The U.S. Army can apply some capabilities in support of the U.S. Border Patrol or other U.S. Agencies to detect suspected elements but cannot engage these elements directly. The U.S. Army does have greater capability to detect, defeat and destroy these types of elements abroad but the approach is different within varying operational environments.

The next category of threats is disruptive threats, which are defined as threats that are "relatively improbable, but potentially dramatic, events that might completely alter the balance of power in modern world, such as if hostile non-state actors gained access to technology much more advanced than that available to DoD."¹² Cyber threats are an example of threats that are in

this category. Cyberspace has become the fifth domain of warfare and is an emerging and unregulated domain with state and non-state actors working to control it. Computer networks are attacked daily by varying elements in an attempt to disrupt normal daily activities.

Response to disruptive threats can also be divided into defensive and offensive activities. The U.S. Army is limited in its capability to conduct defensive or offensive operations against disruptive threats. The knowledge and resources required to operate effectively against these types of threats reside in other agencies within the U.S. Government. The U.S. Army contains the limited capability to protect the organization against attacks and relatively no capability to protect the nation at large. There are several initiatives to grow the capabilities of the U.S. Army Cyber Command.

The U.S. Army provides a supporting role to other governmental organizations attempting to mitigate catastrophic and disruptive threats. The ability of the U.S. Army to provide command and control structures, medical and logistical units, rapid unit deployment and manpower to mitigate catastrophic and disruptive threats is a byproduct of the U.S. Army's strength in combatting traditional threats. It is not effective or economical to transition large number of forces or resources to mitigate these threats based on the probability of these threats having a low likelihood of happening and the U.S. Army not having a primary role in resolving these types of issues. The U.S. Army is primarily focused on threats that occur abroad in the international community. Traditional and irregular threats primarily fall within these categories of threats. The United States has held the advantage of geographical isolation from the rest of the world and with the exception of Mexico, has not gone to war with its neighbors. The primary threats to the United States have and will continue to fall within the domain of traditional and irregular threats.

Traditional Threats

The U.S. Army from its very inception has been designed to fight traditional threats. The first Army under George Washington prided itself for fighting conflicts that were western in nature in order to gain the respect of the British Forces. There were commanders within the Revolutionary War, such as Nathanael Green, who perused irregular methods of warfare but the consensus from the leaders of the U.S. Army was that traditional warfare was the type of warfare required to defeat the British¹³. The United States Army of the time was composed of officers that were educated in the western form of warfare. They understood formations and maneuver warfare using traditional troops and equipment.

At the beginning of the American Revolution, the United States Army quickly transitioned from militia formations to Brigade formations. General George Washington quickly professionalized his Army and organized them into brigades and divisions to fight the British formations.¹⁴ The U.S. Army could have easily fought with insurgency tactics based on the asymmetric match between the Americans and the British; however, they choose to form into traditional formations using traditional tactics. The U.S. Army shrank after the American Revolution but maintained a small standing Army of Brigades and militia Soldiers. The U.S. Army grew again during the War of 1812 and again the Army chose to grow its standing brigades to confront the enemies of the country.¹⁵ Throughout the history of the United States it is clear that the U.S. Army has preferred to fight in a conventional manner.

The following analysis of the major wars the U.S. Army has been engaged in over the 200 years of its existence has conveyed one main fact. The U.S. Army has continually engaged in conventional warfare and has excelled at this type of warfare. In its first engagements with the British Army in the American Revolution and during the War of 1812 the U.S. Army engaged in

predominantly traditional warfare. The second defeat of the British Empire would cement the U.S. Army's ability to fight and win traditional warfare conflicts during the 19th century.

The U.S. Civil War brought a new era to the U.S. Army's ability to conduct traditional warfare. This war in many ways ushered in the era of modern warfare fought in the 20th century. Over the four years of the war, the U.S. and the Confederate Armies would use new technologies such as railroads, telegraphs and new types of rifles. The type of warfare used during the 19th century would change dramatically during the Civil War.¹⁶ The leaders of both the U.S. and Confederate Armies would expand on their lessons learned during the Mexican-American War to enhance and project American warfare into the next century. At the conclusion of the U.S. Civil War, the U.S. Army was more proficient and skilled at modern traditional warfare than it had ever been during its history.¹⁷

During the period after the Civil War, the U.S. Army dramatically downsized, which is the case after most major wars.¹⁸ The United States Government pursued a policy of neutrality based on not wanting involvement in the European war and the unlikelihood of being attacked on the mainland. The United States eventually entered into the conflict after German U-boats continued to sink its ships carrying goods and equipment to Britain.¹⁹ The U.S. Army was slow to mobilize troops to the European Theater. The U.S. Army had not been engaged in a large campaign before and General Jack J. Pershing wanted to ensure the troops were ready to fight and win in combat.²⁰ Over the next year, the United States would engage in offensive warfare with the Germans, which would eventually lead to a conditional surrender and an armistice with Germany.

The interim years between World War I and World War II brought a familiar cycle of drawdowns to the U.S. Army. World War I was seen as the war to end all wars and the United

States went back into a policy of isolationism.²¹ However, the United States ultimately could not avoid World War II because on December 8, 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into World War II. The United States now found itself fighting a war on two different continents. The United States Army was fighting predominately on the European front but also to a minor degree in the Pacific Theater.

The United States Army was involved in World War II for four long years; and was fight from its landing on the western shores of France to deep into the German nation. The U.S. Army played a prominent role in the defeat of the German Army. By the end of World War II, the United States would rise to the level of super-power along with the Soviet Union. The end of World War II also brought the beginning of the Cold War. At the center of the Cold War was the struggle between democracy and communism, specifically the United States and the Soviet Union.²²

The first major battle ground during the Cold War was on the Korean Peninsula. The Soviet Union and the United States Army did not see direct combat but would ultimately fight each other through a series of proxy wars starting with the Korean War. North Korean forces invaded South Korea and readily seized the capital of South Korea and forced the South Korean forces and the U.S. Army to the very tip of the Korean Peninsula. It would take some time for General MacArthur to mobilize the forces required to repel the North Koreans and gain the initiative. The U.S. Army at the beginning of the Korean War was executing the continuous post conflict drawdown and was not prepared for the surprise attack from the North Koreans. The United States Army had to again transition from a drawdown peace time footing to a war-fighting.²³

The Korean War concluded in a stalemate between North Korea and South Korea. Both countries received external support from stronger military forces fighting to support communism or democracy. The U.S. Army along with the U.S. Marine Corps faced forces from North Korea and China, along with combat advisors, pilots, equipment and supplies from the Soviet Union. The Cold War would continue to escalate and the next battlefield would be the country of Vietnam.

The Vietnam War was the first major U.S. conflict that was executed using a non-traditional manner. All the conflicts executed by the United States up to this time period had been executed using traditional warfare. They had all focused on defeating defined enemy forces of nation-states. The American Revolution and the War of 1812 focused on the British Army. World War I and II focused on the forces of Germany and Japan. The Korean War focused on the forces of North Korea but Vietnam would be different. The conflict's initial focus was strategic bombing of North Vietnam to break its will to fight against South Vietnam but the strategy changed over time to primarily supporting and advising of the South Vietnamese Army.²⁴ The United States never pursued an operational or strategic strategy of defeating the North Vietnamese Army.

Joint Publication (JP) 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, defines irregular Warfare (IW) as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).”²⁵ The Vietnam War would be the first conflict the U.S. Army would engage in a conflict to support another armed force to help gain control over its population and to defeat insurgent forces. JP 1 states the following about irregular Warfare:

IW focuses on the control of populations, not on the control of an adversary's forces or territory....What makes IW “irregular” is the focus of its operations – a relevant population – and its strategic purpose – to gain or maintain control or influence over, and the support of that relevant population through political,

psychological, and economic methods. Warfare that has the population as its “focus of operations” requires a different mindset and different capabilities than warfare that focuses on defeating an adversary militarily.²⁶

The U.S. Army was not suited for this type of conflict. The U.S. Army had been traditionally organized to fight and defeat enemy forces. The transition to this type of warfare would present a tremendous amount of difficulty for the U.S. Army.²⁷ The U.S. Army also had to struggle with a force that was now largely composed of draftees versus the all-volunteer force that had been the hallmark of its foundation.²⁸ The end result of Vietnam was that the U.S. Army systematically withdrew from South Vietnam after years of combat. South Vietnam was conquered by North Vietnam within two years after the withdrawal. The U.S. Army would spend the next decade rebuilding the force.

Vietnam would be the first major conflict in the U.S. Army history that was not an overwhelming victory. The lack of victory for the U.S. Army for the first time could be contributed to applying of the wrong capabilities to a strategic or operational problem. The conflict called for irregular warfare capabilities to defeat the insurgents within South Vietnam or traditional warfare capabilities to defeat the North Vietnamese Army to prevent them from contributing forces and supplies to the South Vietnamese insurgents. Over the next decade, the U.S. Army did not transform to a force with more irregular capabilities but to a doctrine that sought to emphasize its strength at traditional warfare.

Over the next 10 to 20 years after the Vietnam War, the world would see the reemergence of a traditional war-fighting foundation executed by the U.S. Army. The invasion of Grenada and Panama displayed a U.S. Army that was capable of rapidly and decisively defeating enemy forces. The real display of the U.S. Army was displayed during the Persian Gulf War with Iraq. The Department of Defense, specifically the U.S.

Air Force, executed a relentless destruction of Iraqi Forces over a six week period demoralizing the Iraqi Forces but not defeating them; however, the overwhelming application of traditional combat power against the Iraqi Forces quickly defeated the Iraqi Army within 100 hours. The result was the reemergence of the U.S. Army as the preeminent ground force.

The U.S. Army was engaged to a limited capacity in Kosovo in the 1990s as a peace keeping force. This operation along with others in Haiti and Somalia occupied the U.S. Army throughout the 1990's. The U.S. Army continued to focus on maintaining its ability to conduct traditional warfare. The U.S. Army would be called upon to execute operations within Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003. The approach used during the invasion into Afghanistan was the use of Army Special Operations Forces (SOF), specifically Army Special Forces. The approach used in Iraq was again traditional in nature and resulted in the defeat of the Iraqi Forces. There is an ongoing debate about the success of the U.S. Army after major combat operations. At the closure of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. Army was struggling with the implementation of a successful counter-insurgency (COIN) plan. It was apparent that violence was subsiding in the country but it was not readily apparent if that was directly contributed to the U.S. Army's COIN plan or to the Sunni Awakening that started in the west of the country.

The majority of U.S. Army operations have been traditional in nature. They have been decisive and successful when the application of traditional combat power has been applied. The times in history when the U.S. Army has not been decisive were when it tried to apply traditional warfare capabilities to an irregular warfare problem, such as in Vietnam. The fact is that the U.S. Army will not be able to choose who it will fight next

but the history of our nation trends predominately towards traditional warfare. The other fact that is apparent in United States history is that most of the conflicts that the United States has been engaged in have been by discretion and not due to existential threat to the state. The American Revolution, War of 1812, the Civil War, World War I, and World War II were all conflicts that threatened the very existence of the United States. All of these wars were wars that the U.S. Army fought in a traditional manner. And all were fought against nation-states, minus the civil war, which had the U.S. Army fighting the confederate Army. The confederate Army fought like a nation-state because the south was ceding from the Union to form a nation-state.

The remainder of the larger conflicts could be placed into a category of choice or discretion. During the Cold War, the United States sought to defeat the threat of communism by fighting wars within countries that it felt were vital to the containment of communism. Whether fighting the North Koreans after a surprise attack or the North Vietnamese influence in South Vietnam insurgency, these were conflicts fought to stop the influence of a perceived threat to the nation and not a literal threat to the existence of the nation. The other conflicts that fall into this category are wars of justice. These types of conflicts such as the Panama invasion to arrest General Manuel Noriega for drug trafficking, the Persian Gulf War to remove Iraqi Forces from Kuwait or Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan to capture Osama bin Laden and prevent the Taliban from harboring terrorists are all conducted in the name of providing justice for some wrong against the United States or the world in general.

Regardless of the conflict, the majority of major conflicts are traditional in nature. Conflicts that have threatened the very existence of the country have been against nation-

states that could bring the resources and forces necessary to defeat the U.S. Army. The conflicts of discretion have been primarily fought as well in a traditional manner. The conflicts that were not decisive and successful for the U.S. Army involved conflicts with irregular warfare threats, specifically insurgent threats. The U.S. Army has continuously shown the capability to defeat traditional threats. The U.S. Army has been an institution built on conducting traditional warfare against nation-states. The only time the United States has had significantly diminished capabilities with traditional war is during times between conflicts when manpower and resources were reduced.

Irregular warfare threats have presented an issue for the U.S. Army due to the mismatch of available capabilities to capabilities required. The capabilities required to defeat irregular threats are different from those needed to defeat traditional threats; however, the U.S. Army does retain irregular warfare capabilities. The mismatch generally happens when traditional capabilities are used to combat irregular threats instead of using irregular capabilities to defeat irregular threats.

Irregular Threats

The first significant irregular threats were presented against the U.S. Army by the Native Americans during the War of 1812. The Native Americans were supported by the British in order to present an obstacle to American expansion to the west.²⁹ The U.S. Army would be able to quell the uprising of the Native Americans during the war but it would not be the last time they would be presented with this problem. The Native Americans would continue to conduct disruptive operations during the Indian Wars from 1865 – 1891 as they fought to prevent the relocations of their tribes. The U.S. Army was able to defeat the Native Americans based on a significant overmatch of capabilities. The

Native Americans did not have the combat power, military expertise, or endurance to overcome the U.S. Army.³⁰ The campaigns to defeat the Native Americans were fought traditionally and brutally and would not be comparable to any modern type of COIN doctrine.³¹

The U.S. Army would not see this type of warfare again until the Moro Rebellion in the Philippines. The Spanish-American War was a short duration conflict with Spain that resulted in the acquisition of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. A military government was instituted in the Philippines after the conflict by the United States Army. Shortly after the military government was instituted, an insurrection ensued. The U.S. Army was able to quell the insurrection and the campaign was one of the few examples where the U.S. Army was able to conduct COIN operations to a high level of success.³²

The next time the U.S. Army would see a campaign conducted against it using irregular warfare would be during the Vietnam War. The Viet Cong, the insurgent group in South Vietnam, conducted a continuous insurgency against the U.S. Army and the South Vietnamese Army for several years resulting in the eventual withdrawal of the U.S. Army and the fall of South Vietnam. The Viet Cong was able to disrupt U.S. Army operations by utilizing the support of equipment, men, and advisors provided by North Korea and China.³³ The U.S. Army conducted a COIN strategy that won significant tactical victories but lost the operational fight, which ultimately resulted in strategic defeat.

The Vietnam War highlighted the fact that the U.S. Army was not invincible and that traditional warfare methods was not capable enough to defeat a strong irregular opponent. The U.S. Army had been able to use fire and maneuver tactics to defeat traditional enemies before the

Vietnam War but was unable to translate those gains into operational success. The U.S. Army would stay clear of COIN and irregular threats throughout the next thirty years. The U.S. Army did engage in peace keeping activities but engaged in predominately traditional warfare. The next time the U.S. Army would see a major irregular warfare engagement was during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The U.S. Army was faced with a significant insurgency after major combat operations. The U.S. Army did eventually quell the insurgency with the help of the Sunni Awakening in Western Iraq.

The lack of success against irregular threats in Vietnam was not due to a lack of capability but due to the lack of applying SOF capabilities against the irregular threats. The Cold War signified a new emphasis on the use of irregular warfare. President John F. Kennedy was aware of this new dynamic and sought to create forces that would excel in the domain of irregular warfare. The Army opposed creating Special Forces to fight irregular threats but President Kennedy directly intervened to ensure U.S. Army Special Forces were given the priority required. Russell Weigly states the following about President Kennedy's intent for Special Forces:

With Special Forces trained in counter guerrilla warfare, and with all the armed forces skilled enough in counter guerrilla war to give the Special Forces support when necessary, Kennedy believed the United States could check Communist wars of national liberation, not with large commitments of American troops, but through teams of Green Berets sharing their expertise with the defenders of threatened countries. With the Green Berets trained not only in unconventional warfare but also in community organization and leadership, preventive medicine, and construction techniques, the Special Forces could engage in nation building as well, both physical and through inspirational leadership, contributing to the remedy for the underlying national incohesiveness that exposed underdeveloped countries to subversion and guerrilla war.³⁴

President Kennedy's model for the use of Special Forces would be rejected after his death by the U.S. Army and the traditional approach of warfare was applied in Vietnam.

The U.S. Army has extensive capabilities to deal with irregular threats. U.S. Army SOF units are designed to conduct irregular warfare. The U.S. Army Special Forces (SF), Civil Affairs (CA), and Military Information Support Operation (MISO) units are the ideal tools to use to defeat irregular warfare threats. The U.S. Army has had tremendous success with these types of units in World War II, Vietnam, and many low intensity conflicts throughout the 20th century. These units are specifically selected and structured to work in operations that are population centric. They are culturally trained and routinely work with indigenous forces in their language. The application of these forces can help to mitigate irregular threats by supporting allied forces in their battle against transnational organizations and insurgencies. U.S. Army SOF allows the Army to use an indirect low profile strategy to influence the internal environment of target nation-states.

The Army has struggled to embrace U.S. Army SOF and the capabilities they provide. In the years following Vietnam, the U.S. Army tried to institutionalize the lessons learned from their failed attempt at COIN into overarching changes within the Army institution. The U.S. Army did not try to institutionalize COIN doctrine but instead tried to convert traditional warfare doctrine to doctrine that might mitigate irregular threats. The U.S. Army moved toward a doctrine called Active Defense. The doctrine was “inspired by attrition theory stress firepower rather than maneuver, favor the defense over the offense, and focus on weapon systems rather than soldiers.”³⁵ It did not last long and was quickly replaced by Air-land Battle Doctrine that stressed maneuver and the offense.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. Army again struggled with how to deal with irregular threats. Brian McAllister Linn highlights this by stating “despite decades of personal

experience to the contrary, army officers have consistently underestimated the difficulty of unconventional warfare, military occupation, and pacification. The price of this hubris has been high, in both the past and the present.”³⁶ The U.S. Army captured flawed assumptions about irregular warfare and encapsulated them into doctrine. In December 2006, the U.S. Army published Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency, as a doctrinal approach to provide “principles and guidelines for counterinsurgency operations” to aid Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.³⁷ The manual was the first counterinsurgency manual written by the U.S. Army. The manual stands as an example of a good theory executed incorrectly and the problem with not understanding the capabilities needed to defeat or mitigate the threat. The definition provided in the manual of counterinsurgency operations are “those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”³⁸ The manual boldly states:

To win, the Army and Marine Corps must rapidly develop an institutional consensus on new doctrine, publish it, and carefully observe its impact on mission accomplishment. This learning cycle should repeat continuously as U.S. counterinsurgents seek to learn faster than the insurgent enemy. The side that learns faster and adapts more rapidly wins.³⁹

The problem with this perspective is that it identifies the U.S. Army as the primary executor of COIN. The definition of COIN identifies that the government has to defeat the insurgency. “On June 28, 2004, the United States granted Iraq sovereignty and created the Iraqi Interim Government under Prime Minister Ayad Allawi.”⁴⁰ The U.S. Army actually needed to be conducting Foreign Internal Defense (FID), which is the “participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency.”⁴¹

The execution of COIN as described in the COIN manual undermines several of the principles identified in the manual. It is difficult to legitimize the government of a nation-state if the U.S. Government and U.S. Army are perceived to be in the lead role. The U.S. Army will never understand the environment as well as the host nation no matter how much training and education is applied to U.S. Forces. The U.S. Government will be unwilling to provide the large number of forces required for the longevity of COIN operations.⁴² There is a very fine line between liberator and occupier. The more forces and resources the U.S. Army applies to the internal affairs of another nation the more the U.S. Government and U.S. Army appears to be in charge, which leads to a change of the primary target of the insurgency from the host nation to the U.S. Government and U.S. Army.⁴³

The theories in FM 3-24 would have worked well if they had been executed by the Iraqi or Afghan Army. The theories in the COIN manual require certain capabilities that must be executed by the host government to be successful. The manual highlights the British experience in Malaya and their success during their counterinsurgency campaign. The manual overlooks a significant factor that Malaya was a colony under the rule of the British government, which makes a difference in how they are viewed by the indigenous population.⁴⁴ The U.S. Army did not have a COIN doctrine before 2006 because there has not been a requirement for one in the twentieth century. The only two significant insurgences against the U.S. Government were the Civil War and the Indian Wars. There has been a FID manual since 1976 with regular updates based on the numerous FID operations that have been successfully conducted by the U.S. Army since the Vietnam War.⁴⁵ The proponent for the FID manual has been the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, which as part of the United States Special Operations Command is the only

U.S. Army Forces legislatively required to train on FID.⁴⁶ It is difficult to be successful if the wrong theories, doctrine, and capabilities are applied to defeat or mitigate irregular threats.

It would be short sighted to think that the use of traditional warfare is not required in defeating irregular warfare. Conventional forces are an intricate part of FID. They help in eliminating crisis within the targeted country in order to provide the host nation and SOF forces time and space to employ a successful strategy; however, their use should be applied in limited situations. Conventional forces should also participate in coalition exercises with the target country, which enables interoperability during crisis and provides an example of a proficient force the host nation army can emulate.

Another application of conventional forces in irregular warfare is in the elimination of external support to transnational organizations and insurgency forces. The rise of globalization has made transnational organizations more powerful than they once were but not beyond the ability of nation-states to control these types of organizations. The key item that both transnational organizations and insurgencies require is external support. The Viet Cong required external support from North Vietnam and China. Al Qaeda required funding sources from other Arabic nation-states and the protection of the Afghanistan government to plan and execute their operations.

Nation-states provide the support required for transnational organizations and insurgencies to thrive. The fall of the Soviet Union ended the Cold War more rapidly than any of the proxy wars fought over the same duration. Irregular threats are significantly diminished if they do not have the support of an external supporter, specifically a nation-state. The ability of the U.S. Army to conduct decisive traditional warfare serves as a

deterrent to other nation-states that would use their resources to encourage or support insurgencies. If deterrence fails, the U.S. Army has the ability to disrupt or defeat these external actors in traditional warfare.

There has been an argument that more of the U.S. Army Forces should be transformed to conduct more SOF like activities because those are the type of skills required to combat irregular threats in the future. There are a couple of flaws with the idea that U.S. Army Forces should transition in this manner. The majority of conflicts the U.S. Army has been engaged in have been traditional in nature not irregular. It is apparent that traditional capabilities applied to irregular threats do create a natural mismatch in the requirements needed to mitigate these types of threats; however, traditional capabilities applied to external actors will neutralize the ability of transnational organizations and insurgencies to be effective against the U.S. Army. The ability of the U.S. Army to deter and defeat nation-states that engage in the support of these types of organizations will have a larger impact than applying traditional warfare formations against irregular threats.

Additionally, the cost to train and educate SOF Soldiers is greater than the cost to train traditional Soldiers. The language requirement to be proficient in foreign environments is very high and can be very costly if Soldiers with the correct aptitude to learn a language are not selected and trained. The regional expertise required to understand the dynamics of a particular insurgency takes constant rotations of troops to a certain geographic region. It would be cost prohibitive to rotate large formations to allied countries with the hope of maintaining cultural and language proficiencies. There are also large numbers of countries that would not be open to the rotation of large formations

rotating into their country or region due to political sensitivities. In a resource constrained environment it is important to maintain efficiencies. The transforming of traditional Soldiers to combat irregular warfare threats would be unnecessary and unwise for the U.S. Army.

There are many in the U.S. Army that point to the flexibility and adaptability of the U.S. Army during the latter stages of the Iraq War. Small unit leaders were able to adapt to the operational environment in order to disrupt the effects of the insurgency. Although this might be true, the U.S. Army is an Army of doctrine.⁴⁷ It guides how the Army organizes, trains, educates leaders and Soldiers, and acquires equipment. A holistic review of U.S. Army doctrine from 2001 to 2012 will identify minor changes in the U.S. Army organization and training methods and priorities. The institutional knowledge and memory of the U.S. Army is not what is happening during the complex operational environment of Vietnam and Iraq but what is recorded in U.S. Army doctrine in the aftermath. In order to have substantial changes within the organization that captures the lessons learned, there must be changes in the organization, training, and education of leaders and Soldiers guided by updated and relevant doctrine.

The Army and the Future

There are a few lessons the U.S. Army should take forward into the future. The first lesson is recognizing and understanding the fundamental culture of the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army has maintained a doctrine of quick and decisive traditional warfare. Unlike the British and French Armies, the United States did not construct an Army to police the colonies but to defeat aggressors in traditional warfare. The U.S. Army as a whole has never been a force that has been able to conduct COIN or irregular warfare as

an organization. The American way of war has been one of annihilation and the destruction of enemy armed forces.⁴⁸ The U.S. Army is organized to fight and win against traditional threats based on its doctrine. The brigade is the primary operational war-fighting unit in the U.S. Army and it is organized to fight in a maneuver centric style. Traditional warfare requires the need for Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery and other types of units that contribute to combined arms maneuver to destroy the enemy. Trying to change the culture of the U.S. Army to do anything else would be very difficult and simply “un-American.”

The second lesson is the Army should retain and maintain its core values and competencies in fighting traditional warfare. The primary existential threats of the past and of the future have not required the U.S. Army to maintain a primarily irregular warfare fighting organization. The fact that traditional warfare has diminished in its frequency and intensity doesn’t render it insignificant or irrelevant. The lack of will of other nation-states to engage the United States in traditional warfare doesn’t automatically translate to a lack of capacity to engage us.

The third lesson is the Army needs to realize that traditional warfare has limits and one of those limits is against irregular threats. SOF has the capability to mitigate and defeat irregular threats. SOF units can be used to enhance the U.S. Army’s ability to eliminate the capabilities mismatch when confronting irregular threats. Special Forces Soldiers used in the initial stages of Operation Enduring Freedom and during FID operations in the Philippines, El Salvador, and Colombia present examples of the U.S. Army using SOF forces to provide capabilities against paramilitary and insurgency threats. The application of these forces provided force multipliers to the U.S. Army.

There is always a debate in the interwar years on what should be the appropriate size and composition of the U.S. Army. There is definitely a delicate balance needed between having too few units and having too many units, which wastes government resources that could be used in other areas of the budget. The determination resides with the civilian leadership of the country based on the sound advice of the military leadership. Ultimately, the U.S. Army is analogous to a car insurance policy. The government can reduce the cost required to maintain a ready and trained standing Army but the upfront cost (deductible) needed to ensure success in a time of war will be very costly; however, not maintaining a ready and trained Army could be catastrophic to the nation and would be similar to not having insurance at all.

Defeating irregular threats will require traditional warfare to limit external actors from providing support to transnational organizations and insurgencies, while providing host nation and SOF forces the ability to deny these elements the maneuver space to conduct activities. The strength of the U.S. Army is the ability to combine these actions to defeat both traditional and irregular threats.

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² Franklin Mark Osanka, ed, *Modern Guerilla Warfare*, (New York, NY: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), page xxii.

³ U.S. Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment 2010*, (Norfolk, VA: U.S. Joint Forces Command, February 2010), Page 65.

⁴ Michael R. Melillo, "Outfitting a Big-War Military with Small-War Capabilities," *Parameters*, Vol. XXXVI (Autumn 2006): page 23.

⁵ Leon E. Panetta, "The Force of the 21st Century," Speech at the National Press Club, Washington, DC, December 2012.

⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Defense Budget Priorities and Choices*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, January 2012), page 2.

⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, February 2006), page 19.

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- ⁸ U.S. DoD, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, page 16.
- ⁹ Congressional Budget Office, *A CBO Study: Options for Restructuring the Army*, (Washington, D.C.: The Congress of the United States, 2005), page 7.
- ¹⁰ Headquarters Department of the Army, *Civil Support Operations*, FM 3-28, (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, August 2010), page 1-14.
- ¹¹ Headquarters Department of the Army, *Civil Support Operations*, page 3-8.
- ¹² Congressional Budget Office, *A CBO Study: Options for Restructuring the Army*, page 7.
- ¹³ John Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare have Shaped Our World*, (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), page 30.
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- ¹⁵ McGrath, *The Brigade: A History: Its Organization and Employment in the US Army*, page 11.
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- ¹⁸ Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, page 262-263.
- ¹⁹ Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, page 352-353.
- ²⁰ Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, page 358-359.
- ²¹ Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, page 396.
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- ²³ Morris, *History of the U.S. Army*, page 202-203.
- ²⁴ Bernd Greiner, *War Without Fronts: The USA in Vietnam*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), page 40.
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- ²⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, JP 1, page I-7.
- ²⁷ James S. Corum, *Bad Strategies: How Major Powers Fail in Counterinsurgency*, (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2008), page 173-174.
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- ³⁰ Tebbel, *The American Indian Wars*, page 298.
- ³¹ Tebbel, *The American Indian Wars*, page 299-301.
- ³² Daniel G. Miller, "American Military Strategy During the Moro Insurrection in the Philippines 1903-1913," Master's Thesis, (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2009), page 1-2.
- ³³ Greiner, *War Without Fronts: The USA in Vietnam*, page 39 -40.
- ³⁴ Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War*, (Bloomington, IN: Indianan University Press, 1977), page 457.

³⁵ Jeffrey W. Long, “The evolution of U.S. Army Doctrine: From Active Defense to Airland Battle and Beyond.” Master’s Thesis, (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1991), page 33.

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³⁷ Headquarters Department of the Army and Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24 or MCWP 3-33.5, (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006), Foreword.

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⁴⁰ Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian, ed, *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2008), page 248.

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